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REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONFERENCES

Addendum*

VIII. REVIEW OF THE PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1994-1995: CONFERENCE SERVICES

A. Introduction and overview

1. At its 327th meeting, on 12 June 1991, the Committee on Conferences decided to review the relevant programme narrative of the proposed programme budgets for conference and library services, and to provide its views thereon to the General Assembly.

2. At its 360th and 361st meetings, on 2 and 3 November 1993, the Committee reviewed section 25E of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1994-1995, Conference services (A/48/6 (sect. 25E)).

B. Discussion

3. Clarification was sought and received from the Secretariat regarding various aspects of the proposed programme budget, including the considerable delay in the issuance of the budget fascicle until the end of October.

4. In view of the significant increase in the workload of the Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, particularly those activities related to peace-keeping operations, a number of delegations expressed deep concern about the inadequacy of resources allocated to the Office of Conference Services to

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* The present document contains an addendum to the report of the Committee on Conferences. The complete report will be issued as Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 32 (A/48/32/Rev.2).

deal with the additional demands placed on it, in particular in the Interpretation and Translation Divisions. That situation had resulted during the past two years in considerable delays in the issuance, in all official languages, of the documentation submitted to intergovernmental bodies. It had also resulted in a sharp increase in the number of meetings held without interpretation. The situation might deteriorate further in the coming biennium, in view of the increase in the number of world conferences and the expected high level of Security Council activities in peace-keeping operations. In that context, some delegations had expressed the wish that, while reaffirming the principle that the Office of Conference Services should continue to be financed through the regular budget, some posts financed through the peace-keeping support account be allocated to the Office, in particular in the Translation Division.

5. Other delegations expressed deep reservations about that proposal on the grounds that conference services, since they were fundamental support services for all bodies of the Organization, should be funded entirely through the regular budget.

6. Clarification was sought and received on the continued application of economy measures at Geneva and Vienna, which was a cause for concern, particularly with regard to Geneva where the measures affected the provision of conference services to bodies serviced by the Centre for Human Rights.

7. In response to a query regarding progress towards the establishment of unified conference services at Vienna to be administered by the United Nations, the representative of the Secretariat stated that negotiations with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) were proceeding following a meeting between the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management and the Director-General of UNIDO.

C. Conclusions and recommendations

8. The Committee, sincerely regretting that the issuance of the budget fascicle on conference services had been delayed until the end of October, recalled its responsibility to advise the General Assembly on the current and future requirements of the Organization for conference services, facilities and documentation, and that the provision to the United Nations of appropriate, timely, high-quality conference services, in the most cost-effective manner possible, with due respect for the equal treatment of all official languages, was an essential element in the efficient functioning of the Organization.

9. In order to achieve the required level of services, enhanced coordination and technological innovation were indispensable, but equally essential was the provision of adequate human and material resources. In that connection, the Committee took note of the proposal to maintain the post of Assistant Secretary-General and to reclassify certain posts.

10. In view of the limited resources available for conference servicing and in order to improve the provision of conference services, the conversion of temporary posts to established posts should be considered whenever such a conversion was deemed to be more cost-effective.

11. In view of the foregoing, the Committee also recommended that the six temporary posts requested for the purpose of eliminating the backlog in the United Nations Treaty Series should be converted to established posts.

12. The Committee expressed deep concern at the continued application of economy measures introduced by the Secretary-General on 26 August 1993 in the conference-servicing area, particularly at Geneva, where the measures affected the provision of conference services to bodies serviced by the Centre for Human Rights and had adverse effects on the functioning of the Centre. While appreciating any efforts aimed at reducing costs, the Committee recommended that those measures should be lifted with immediate effect.

13. The Committee requested the Secretariat to study the possibility of transferring to the Office of Conference Services the staff specialized in the drafting of press releases, so that they could prepare summary records as well, and to submit the results of that study to the Committee and to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session.

14. The Committee also took note of the fact that negotiations with UNIDO were proceeding following a meeting between the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management and the Director-General of UNIDO, and reiterated its request that negotiations be concluded as quickly as possible. The Committee emphasized that, in pursuing further negotiations with UNIDO, the Secretariat should proceed from the premise that the primary concern of Member States was to ensure that their combined financial burden for providing conference services to the United Nations Office at Vienna and UNIDO should in the long run benefit from the unification agreement.

15. The Committee decided that in future its review of the proposed programme budget for conference services should be expanded to include conference services at Nairobi and at the regional commissions.